

7: Thompson--374
116, 306, 341, 532

J-4

(no date) 1937

Laotians

"The seventeenth century was an era of peace that permitted the Laotian arts to flourish. The insouciance, which is a Laotian characteristic, explains the fragility of their innumerable monuments. In the South, Khmer influence predominates; in the North, Burmese. Under this double aegis temples, libraries, and reliquaries have been built by the Laotians without originality but always with grace and elegance. The pitiless tropical vegetation has strangled almost all of them: even the Vat Prakeo, which the French have tried to save, seems doomed to destruction. The wood sculpture is of gigantic proportions and fashioned in the expressionless attitude of the Buddhist liturgy. The painting, which consists of frescoes in the pagodas, was the work of foreign artists of whom the Laotians were only the pupils. It is in jewellery and the working of precious metals that the Laotians have shown their most inventive artistry. Like all Far Eastern peoples they are very clever at basketry and weaving."

"An hour's halt is sufficient, and we soon enter a wilder country. On our right stands a perpendicular calcareous cliff, and a series of strata appear vertically on the surface. A fissure between two of them, like the one already noticed at Sou La, also marks the entrance to a grotto. The Tham Pa Kouang (grotto of the great stag) is celebrated, and it well repays a visit. [273] A staircase about twenty yards high leads to it; on the right a ruined house which leans against the rock is occasionally used as a lodging by some priests; red devils with large heads, armed with sabres, are carved on both sides of the entrance. The first hall is spacious; it is fifteen yards high, and the natural irregularities have been respected and even turned to account; the walls are decorated with green moss, and the ceiling is made of large stalactites joined and rounded. Upon the ground, upon the steps, upon isolated stones and in the hollows, everywhere, in the midst of the greatest disorder, a people of gods of every shape and every size has found a home. Statuettes from one yard high, to one or two inches, of black or gilt wood, of marble, bronze, or copper; gods standing with their hands raised as though in benediction; stout Buddhas, with bare heads, squatting down, their arms folded across their stomach, their shoulders often covered with a piece of stuff arranged like a cape; bonzes, saints, prophets and their servants, showing the same type as the idols of Siam. The whole Buddhist Olympia is united here, and when the idols are carefully examined, one believes that traces may be found amongst them of all religions and of all nations; here something from Greece, there a reminiscence of Egyptian art, while

further on a marble head ornamented by a raised diadem, reminds one of the Khiner monuments. All these gods lie about everywhere, turned in every direction, hidden or fallen, often covered with dust; there is not a corner without its deity, and niches are often cut by the hand of man and ornamented with carvings of gilded wood, to shelter an exceptionally venerated saint. Even [274] animals are represented; in one rock two elephants are cut out and dyed green, each carrying a personage. In another corner stands a white elephant, one of the incarnations of Buddha. The body, which is about a yard and a half high, is made of wood and stuff, and the whole is covered with calico. Some small earthen cones, surmounted by a stick, are arranged in front of the sacred animal, forming a miniature garden with a tiny staircase. I believe they represent something analogous to our ex-votos. If I can believe the interpreter's explanations, these earthen cakes are placed here by people who have been ill and wish to thank heaven for preserving their life; the number of the cones corresponds with their age. The entrance hall, which at the first glance resembles an old curiosity shop, is lighted from the outside; it leads to other galleries, which we explored with a lantern. Corridor succeeds corridor, it seems as though the grotto were endless, and it must really extend for a great distance. Legend relates that it communicates with Laf' Chou. Sometimes the passages are so narrow that we are forced to crawl through them, sometimes the rooms are large enough for us to stand upright. In some of them a bamboo bed

10: d'Orleans--272-274

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos-3

116, 532, 778

denotes the sojourn of some pilgrim or belated fisherman. One division, which is reached by a rectangular entrance, is filled with a multitude of small divinities of the same size and form. This must be a reserve stock, for the walls are covered with red and gilt paper."

10: d'Orleans--325

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos

116, 316, 346, 532, 821

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "When we land on the left bank, we notice a number of people stooping down, with their feet in the water, engaged in washing out the sand; these are gold finders, who earn but a scanty living, though they sometimes come upon an old coin or two which has been washed down stream. A climb of about fifty feet up decrepit steps, which in summer are under water, brings us to the town. Close upon the left is a small pagoda, Ouate Pouné Sái, which is only remarkable for the fresco above the entrance gate, this representing Kóp, the sun, eating the moon; in other words, the fresco is intended to designate an eclipse."

10: d'Orleans--330-331

T-3 (1891-92) 1894

Laos

116, 346, ~~532~~, 778

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "The market occupies the principal artery of the town, with numerous pagodas and palaces to the right and left, one of those on the left being Ouate Ma', ouate being the word used in Laotian, Siamese, and Burmese, to signify temple, while ma' means new. The pagoda itself from 100 to 130 feet long by fifty to seventy feet broad, with whitewashed walls and a tile roof. The interior is very similar to that of a Catholic church, with pictures on the walls representing religious legends, and at the end an altar, upon which are accumulated ornaments of all kinds and statues of gods in every variety of pose, while in the centre, as in all the other temples, is a golden figure of Buddha seated, from seven to ten feet high. The features are the same in all these statues of Buddha, and, with his legs crossed, and his hands resting upon his thigh the statue which is more the outcome of high strung religious feelings, and represents the very spirit of the races which have [331] succeeded one another upon this soil for so many centuries, than the work of any great artist, seems to have concentrated in it attitude, its countenance, and its gaze, the essence of the moral beliefs, the object of existence, and the reason of death, as they were conceived by one-half of the old world."

10: d'Orleans--331-332

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos

116, 173, 532, 778

"With the exception of the principal statue, the gods are not seated, and in this pagoda of Ouate Mal, the divinity held in the greatest veneration is one with outstretched hands as if in the act of giving the benediction. This is the Prabang or 'Buddha of the gold washings,' as he is made out of the gold found in the district. Tradition has it that this deity was brought here by the Laotians, when they emigrated from Muong-Theng, and that, after being carried off to Bangkok by the Siamese, it was brought back to Luang Prabang about twenty years ago. Another legend is that the statue was sent about 200 years ago by the king of Cambodia; but in any case it has given its name to the town, and it is covered with embroideries and chasubles, and placed in the recess of a reliquary to which diverse ornaments are suspended. In front of this is a movable bronze grating, ending in two dragons with intertwined tails, called Nák, while to the left of the altar is a pulpit very similar to a sedan chair, from which the bonzes [332] give their lessons and recite their prayers."

10: d'Orleans--333
116, 532, 778, 793, 177.35

T-3 (1891-92) 1894

Laos

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "Above the market and built against the hill is the residence of one of the four leading bonzes from whom we had a visit yesterday; and upon going to see him there we find that the interior is ornamented with coloured designs and pictures, given him by Frenchmen, of the Eiffel Tower and so forth, with a small chapel in one corner and a library of religious books, many of which are rolled up in palm leaves. The only curious object in the adjoining pagoda is a wooden statue of Buddha (Pasine), in a crouching attitude, like that of a monkey when scratching his chin. The skull is very depressed and misshapen; and it is possible that those who offered the image were desirous of depicting the incident in his life, when having complained to God of the temptation which the flesh evoked in him, he received by way of reply a violent blow on the head in order to crush his carnal appetites. "

10: d'Orleans--333-334

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos

116, 346, 532, 177. 53

[LSS: in Luang Prabang] "Among the other pagodas are Ouate Tiomsi, which contains nothing remarkable, and Ouate Pahope, with a good deal of wood carving and frescoes representing animals and scenes in the life of Buddha, to say nothing of pictures of Frenchwomen in the dress of the First Empire, which may possibly have been brought here by the traveller Monhot some forty years ago. Beyond these are Ouate Paphay and Ouate Pakay, both of which are very graceful and have beautifully carved facades. The whole effect reminds me in a remote measure of the Hindoo architecture, and among the figures on the wood-carving of the doors is [334] one of Nangmanouba, a woman standing up on a dragon, and another of a personage wearing a costume very similar to that which was in vogue with us during the middle ages."

10: d'Orleans--339-340
116, 346, 361, 532, 778

T-3

(1891-92) 1894

Laos

"Part of the town is very sparsely inhabited, a few ruins on the track indicating the site [340] of the ancient ramparts, while turning back in the direction of the river, we have on our left the grounds of several houses belonging to mandarins, and on the right, at the foot of the hill, a group of pagodas well worth a visit.

The most important of these is Ouate Uisoune, so named after the king who built it. Dating, as the Siamese Colonel tells us, from the fourteenth century, it is in a very decrepit state, but there is much in it worth seeing; notably the gates which are of carved wood and gilt. To the right in Pra Noriei, the fourarmed goddess, borne up by Kroute, the god of the birds, and in the centre are two women, one of whom is being carried by five elephants, while to the left a god standing erect upon a buffalo is supposed to represent the chief of the coolies who weed the courtyards of the pagodas. In the interior are a number of wooden columns covered with gilded designs and others of masonry, together with pictures representing the history of Pra Uetsandaha and of Guadama. Upon the altar is a large gilt statue called Pratiao Ong Luong (great god)."

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"The dances begin, and two men emerge from the pagoda enveloped in vast cloaks coming down to their heels which are meant to designate the skin of some wild animal, while they have on their heads a mask of black wood representing some monster with enormous eyes, large mouth with very sharp teeth, very long ears and a lower jaw which can be moved at will. Behind the head is a long mane of coarse hair, and we are told that they are known as Pi Konge, or devils with a cruel face, while the old bonze says that they are the chiefs of the tigers, or the Pi Sua (race of devils). The Siamese Colonel adds that in the Laos they are known as Pou Yen (from Pou, father) or Ya Yen (from Ya, mother), and there is a legend that men of this kind once lived in a large forest, and that though they inspired great terror two of them were captured, these monsters representing the captive pair. It is interesting to compare this native tradition with the assertion of several travellers that the Laos was formerly inhabited by a hairy race of men."

"The Phra-Keo Pagoda or Temple of the Emerald Buddha, [HD: in Vientiane] is, by tradition, supposed to have been founded in A.D. 814, but it was razed by the Siamese and the Emerald Buddha was carried off to Bangkok where it may still be admired in its gorgeous temple. Needless to say, the Emerald Buddha is not carved out of emerald. It is fashioned in green jasper and is undoubtedly of Laotian workmanship, for the image, as you can behold it in the Siamese capital, has a most Laotian face, vehement, cunning and, it may be, lecherous.

The sight of Vientiane to-day is the That-Luong. This large stupa is some mile and a half outside the city and is set in a palm grove. The buildings seem to date from about 1567 and were put up to shelter a relic of the Buddha. The sanctuary was spared by the Siamese. However, in 1874, the Chinese Yunnan land-pirates, who feared neither God nor man, plundered and ravaged the shrine. It was botched up unskillfully, but a few years ago, was restored to its pristine appearance through the efforts of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient. The stupa not only shows the curious bulbous spire we noted at Luang-Prabang, but the whole place is uncommonly complicated in plan. It is surrounded by a cloister in the Siamese mode and the stupa itself rises from a series of rectangular terraces set round with numerous pinnacles joined together by an arcade."

"Some of the Vientiane and the Luang-Prabang temples still contain a number of bronzes, mostly of the Buddha, seated, upright or reclining. These figures, which have only just begun to appear in the European market, are already rather keenly sought after and soon may become quite rare. The Laotian bronzes show a high degree of stylization. The long fingers are as supple as tendrils, while the feet are harsh and squared as though hacked out with a hatchet. The chest is taut and rounded, the waist exceedingly [110]slender. The heads and faces are of the same style as those of the stone or lacquer images we saw at Luang-Prabang. Under the curved nose, the thick lips are pursed up into a rather disdainful pout, which in some statues takes on what must be called a leer. From the topknot flares up a burst of flames conventionalized so as to resemble a budding daffodil--all rather super-realist. (1)

1. The ancient Laotians seem to have been skilled in the difficult art of large-scale bronze-casting. From what remains of the Buddha in the Vat Manorum at Luang-Prabang, the original image must have stood over eighteen feet without its pedestal. Often the Laotian Buddhas have a date engraved upon them but it is only a cyclic era date so that no absolute chronology can be established."

A DRAGON APPARENT

000 eventually to the Buddhas to solicit their curative powers; and if so what we should learn from it about the prevalence of disease among Europeans.

- 217 The museum of Vientiane, which I visited in the hope of learning
● 532 something of the living art of the country, has also little more to
171 show than a collection of Buddhas. There is a tranquillity, a lack of
compulsion in the Hinayanist Buddhism of Cambodia and Laos —
so different from the neurotic deformation practised by the later
Khmer kings — which is not propitious to the development of
religious art. There was no violence or drama in the life of Buddha
comparable to that of Christ, and the Indian Epics have been es-
chewed in Laos as improperly secular. It has been enough to
carve Buddhas, and more Buddhas *ad infinitum*, seeking perhaps
to multiply in this way the magic virtues which each image con-
tains. The curator takes you round, explaining the characteristic
postures — there are seven or eight — all of which can be appre-
ciated in five minutes. After that there are minute differences of
physique and physiognomy to be noted that reflect the influences of
India, of Java, of Thibet or of Ceylon. That is all.

177 By the time the museums turn to the art of the people, the
532 grotesque animals in bamboo, the carved movable figures which
782 are obscene to European eyes — all of which become a pagan burnt-
offering at the end of each *boun*¹ — it will be too late. The microphone
is an infallible sign of what is to come. Nothing of this kind will
survive the era of materialism, under whatever form it arrives.

253 These are the sights of Vientiane, but in addition there is a
825 spectacle which is popular with Europeans, who, remote, isolated,
and living under difficulties, tend to shut themselves up within the
protective social rituals of people in exile.

This spectacle is the slaughterhouse at work. I do not know
whether or not it is illegal in Laotian law to kill animals, but
certainly it is thought shameful, and the killing for Europeans is
done at the dead of night on the outskirts of the town. The

¹[Laotian religious
Festival. -- Analyst] 254

A DRAGON APPARENT

000 There was a recognized place about a mile up the river, which was free from weed and rock, and once again, because the water was deep and swiftly running, it was very cold and refreshing. We had
 515 been swimming round for an hour or so when we noticed a number of Laotian girls hanging about. They were not watching us, but sauntering backwards and forwards in twos and threes, chatting to each other. By the time there were twelve of them, Dupont, keeping well in the water called to them and asked if we were disturbing them in any way. One of the girls came to the edge of the bank, bowed, and looking down at her feet said that it was their usual bathing time, but that there was no hurry, of course. Dupont asked the girls if they would retire for a moment, and they walked a short distance away and stood in a preoccupied circle while we got out of the water. We then dressed quickly and walked on down the path leading to their village. After about a hundred yards we looked back. All the girls, quite naked, were in the water. At that moment two bonzes were strolling slowly along the bank past them; but the girls paid no attention. The bonzes were wrapped in the mantle of holy invisibility.

622 When we reached the village, Dupont asked punctiliously for
 304 the headman, making the excuse that he wanted to visit the pagoda. It was quite evident that this headman was in the good graces of the garrison, and probably supplied them with labour. He was very dignified and had a fine house, with European furniture. Although barefooted, he wore a French suit. On the suggestions of the soldier from the camp he took down his trousers and showed us his legs, which from ankles to thighs were tattooed, in the local manner, so
 796 closely that he seemed to be wearing stockings. The annual *boun*¹
 782 had just been celebrated at the local pagoda and a bonze was in the
 ● 532 act of sweeping into a heap the votive offerings with which the floor
 285 of the courtyard was littered. There was a great collection of elephants, buffaloes, peacocks and tigers, all woven in basket-work. The kind of thing that Picasso produces when he is not painting, but perhaps rather better. They seemed to me to be of

271

¹/₂ [i.e., religious festival.--Analyst]

THE ROAD TO XIEN KHOUANG

the greatest artistic interest. I asked the headman if it would be possible to take any, as the bonze was crumpling and smashing them vigorously with his broom. But the chief shook his head regretfully. Buddhism had degenerated in these remote provinces and was swamped with re-emergent spirit cults. These objects had been dedicated to the *phi* and would have to be burnt in a ritual fire. The *phi* would also receive the burnt essence, I noticed, of a large, very obscene, and no doubt magically valuable picture.

At about this time when the bonze was treading underfoot the village's artistic output of several months, a party of Issarak or Viet Minh, timing their action to coincide with the convoy's arrival, Mounk Kassy, had set fire to the forest just south of the post. A steady breeze was blowing from that quarter, and the fire, started over a width of about a mile and fanning out as it advanced, moved slowly towards the fort.

Coming up over the river bank it took us some time to realize what was happening. There was a haze; but then there was always a haze in Laos, although by this time of day it should have been clearing and not thickening. And then we heard the crackling, punctuated with the sharp pops, which might have been distant rifle fire, but which were the explosions of thick stems of bamboo. Looking up then we saw the curtain of smoke hanging over Muong Kassy, white at the top, and black at its base and streaked occasionally by lance-points of flame, which were still two miles away.

We ran to where the car was parked, started it and tried to drive down the road towards the fire. Dupont was as pleased with it as July 14th. In about fifty yards we got tangled up with the convoy and had to leave the car on the side of the road and run on. The fire was advancing on a ragged front and was as irresistible as a volcano. Black smoke was being blown before it so that at first the flames were out of sight; but when they came through they were two hundred feet high — twice the height of the tallest tree. It went forward in zigzagging rushes; eating its way quickly through the bamboo

* [i.e., spirits. -- 275
Analyst]

633 Lunet de la Jonquiere has deduced that the ramparts of
643* Vientiane were composed of brick walls from four to six
175* meters in height with an earth banquette inside. They in-
172 cluded three sections, the salients of which were provided
/712/ with circular forts about eight meters high. Two gates
which were fortified and crowned with spearhead ornaments
gave entrance to the second section, one on the east towards
the That-Luong, and the other on the west at the exit of the
present Luang-Prabang road.

royal palace in the pagoda of which the emerald Buddha (Pra-Keo),
the sign of power and command /82/ which he had brought from
Xieng-Mai in 1548 (1), was placed.

/778/ 1. The emerald Buddha was in reality cut from a block of
green jasper. The Siamese were to capture it in 1778 and
take it to Bangkok, of which it became the tutelary divinity
and where the sumptuous temple which rises today in the
first court of the royal palace was built for it in 1785.

172 Of the eighty some pagodas which Vientiane was to boast, the
633 Wat Pra-Keo was assuredly one of the greatest and most beautiful.
175* "The trees which veil it (today), the lianas which tie it to the columns
and spread a mysterious shadow over its ruins make the visitor feel
something of what the soul of the ancients felt on the threshold of a
sacred wood. Brick openwork forms the enclosure and monumental
staircases lead to the parvis. A dragon writhes on the ramps and
raises its menacing head in a last coil. The columns of the gallery
are graceful, tall, slender and without a base, but end in a capital
of long, sharp leaves which fold outwards and look as though they
were raised by the weight which they bear. . ." (2).

2. De Carne, op. cit. /Voyage en Indochine et dans
l'Empire chinois. Paris, 1872. /

175* The sanctuary was built on a terrace with three levels. The facade
172 opened onto a monumental portico whose three gateways and side
346 windows were richly framed /83/ /Page 83 is devoted to an illustra-
532 tion: "Ruins of the Pra-Keo at Vientiane"--Translator. / /84/ with
many-colored sculptures. The whole edifice was entirely gilded on
the outside.

The roof, the greater part of which still existed when Pavie 175*
went to Vientiane, has since collapsed and the two colossal statues 172
of Buddha which sit on the abandoned altar remain exposed to the 346
elements. Even as it is this grandiose ruin is wonderfully allied to 532
the natural vegetation which holds it in its grasp and one cannot,
without some emotion, evoke before it the past splendor of the
kingdom of Lan-Xang.

But the capital accomplishment of Setthitharath is the That-
Luong, located about two kilometers away from the city. It is /341/
doubtless also the masterpiece of this Laotian architecture which
has no powers of endurance but which cannot be denied grace and
elegance. Miraculously spared by the Siamese at the beginning of
the nineteenth century, the That-Luong was overthrown in 1873 by
the Yunnanese pirates and partly restored, in rather a clumsy man-
ner, in 1897-1898.

This pyramidal edifice, called the "plume of the world" by its
founder, was the "reliquary of the kingdom" and is still a highly
frequented center of pilgrimage. A stele commemorating its
erection bears /85/ the date 1566, and according to legend the
original that was built about the eleventh century on one of Buddha's
hairs.

The first enclosure, which has today crumbled away, is almost
confused with the large group of ruined temples which surrounds it.
It was formed by an open cloister which was colored with frescoes
and in which the faithful and the priests assembled. The second
enclosure is formed by a ledge along which runs a garland of bulging
ornaments. "One would be tempted to call them the petals of a
gigantic lotus bloom on the point of opening. Heavy pedestals
covered with inscriptions support thirty-four slender pinnacles.
Leaning on these pedestals as on buttresses, the mass on which the
pyramid is set begins to deploy its curves and the pyramid itself
springs from a sheaf of broad leaves, like the stem of a plant. . .
It once sparkled with gold applied on a lead base, shreds of which can
still be seen" (1).

1. De Carne, *ibid.* /Voyage en Indochine et dans l'Empire
chinoise. Paris, 1872. /, quoted by Aymonier, *Voyage dans
le Laos*. See below, *Laotian Architecture*, p. 124.

First Burmese invasion (1563-1565). Solidly entrenched in his 643*
new capital, Setthathirath waited to see what the turn of events 648*
would be. /86/ He did not have long to wait, for Bureng-Naung 726
175*

"The wooden panels which formed the walls, the corbels, and the beams were all carved with great delicacy. This pagoda was as pretty in the fineness of its details as it was elegant in its general lines.

"But nothing is left of it" (1).

1. Cf. G. Maspero, *L'Indochine /Un empire colonial francais: l'Indochine*, Paris, 1929-1930/, p. 186.

Sculpture. For these sanctuaries, the Laotians made hordes of statues out of stone, brick, and especially bronze, which were wholly or partly covered with gold. Of the latter, which were always molded from wax models, some attained gigantic size. All of them strike the various attitudes of the Buddhist liturgy. The bodies are sketchily draped and may be seated, standing, walking or lying down, their arms outspread. The faces are surmounted by a sort of tiara and are frozen in a hieratic smile which is not very expressive and seldom varies.

Painting. As for the fresco paintings which brighten the walls of certain pagodas, they are not of any special interest. Most of them were "primarily the work of Burmese, Cambodians or Chinese of whom the native artists (were only) the pupils" (1).

1. Cf. L. de Reinach, *op. cit. /Le Laos*, posthumous edition, Paris, 1911/, p. 342.

The art of the gold and silver smith. On the other hand, the Laotian jewelers and silversmiths knew and still know, with only the most meager of tools, how to work gold and silver admirably--primarily silver--and how to chase and engrave it. Their motifs show an attractive decorative invention, and it is chiefly in this "minor art" which borders on small-scale industry that we find the most original manifestations of old-time Laotian life -- betel services, vases, cups, sword and dagger hilts; bracelets, necklaces, rings, headpins, earrings, etc.

Basketwork and weaving. Finally, "like all the peoples of the Far East, the Laotians are skilled in all kinds of basketwork. A very pretty object which seems to be peculiar to this land is the small basket for women in which the basketwork is covered with

115: Le Boulanger--82 H-4 (no date) 1931 AM1 Indochina
(1300-1700) Laotians AM8

285 lacquer -- red on the inside and black on the outside -- and deco-
532 rated with a fine gilt design which makes a border, like a galloon" (1).
175*

1. Cf. G. Maspero, *ibid.* /Un empire colonial français:
l'Indochine. Paris, 1929-1930/, pp. 190-191.

286 Even today weaving remains women's work, and is done solely in
462 the home. The materials, which may be silk or cotton, striped or
532 splashed with colors, embroidered or spangled with gold and silver
thread, nevertheless acquire, under the action of light and carefree
hands, chatoyant, harmonious or dazzling tones, and yet the looms
which are used are simple in the extreme. Patterns "are obtained,
as before the invention of the Jacquard loom, by alternately isolating
or raising certain woof threads by means of thin bamboo splints" (2).

2. Cf. L. de Reinach, *ibid.* /Le Laos, posthumous edition,
Paris, 1911/, p. 333.

181 Thus did the Laotian of the seventeenth century live in peace,
respecting the law of the least effort with an amiable perseverance
amidst his laughter and his games. . . . The princes were perhaps the
/565/ only ones in the whole kingdom to know any of the worries which
power and its exigencies bring, and it was for not having wished to
compromise with his authoritarian principles that King Souliga,
towards the end of his reign, compromised the destinies of his people
forever.

643* Condemnation of the heir apparent to death. He had three chil-
175* dren, a son Tiao Ratsabout and two daughters. His son married Nang-
648* Tian-Koumali, who gave birth in her turn to two children, King-
Kitsarath and Intha-Som. Nang-Tian-Koumali was the sister of a
prince of the Sip-Song-Panas who had been driven out of his country
by a Chinese invasion and whom the king of Lan-Xang had welcomed
in Vientiane together with his family. Tiao Ratsabout, however,
committed the imprudence of seducing the wife of the chief palace
page. In accordance with his edict which punished the crime of
/684/ adultery by death, Souliga pitilessly referred the deceived husband's
complaint to the royal tribunal and allowed his son to be sentenced
to capital punishment.

The result was that at the king's death, which occurred /130/ in
1694, the direct heirs to the crown were his grandsons King-Kitsarath

- 369 Anou had built the new temple of Sisaket not far from the deconse-
175 crated Prakeo "with the purpose of attracting the grace of Heaven
/346/ to the souls of his parents as well as to those of all his relatives and
to all the souls which people Hell and the world" (2). The corner-

2. Cf. inscription on the stele.

stone was laid on "Thursday, the ninth day of the waxing moon of the year Kap-San" (1824), in the midst of a large assembly of the populace.

- 778 Inauguration of the temple of Sisaket (1824). On this occasion
796 the king made innumerable gifts to the bonzes (clothing, sandals,
346 fans, iron pen points to write on latania leaves, mats, mattresses,
175* copper betel services, rice baskets, vases, metal drinking cups,
carafes, goblets, etc.). He gave /163/ pieces of cloth to the poor,
and generous bounties to artisans and musicians. The people walked
in procession around the royal palace, carrying oriflammes and
effigies of animals which were flowered and perfumed with incense.
The holiday lasted three days, to the accompaniment of general
rejoicing (1).

1. Ibid. /Inscription on the stele. /

- 346 This temple was the only one which the French found still stand-
ing when they reached Vientiane. Of the first enclosure there re-
main two 'thats', which have recently been restored, and an elegant
square pavilion-library whose quadruple pinnacled roof is supported
by a graceful colonnade. Three other pavilions have disappeared (2).

2. A bath pavilion, one for worship and one for the tom-
toms and gongs.

- /532/ A cloister pierced by a porch on each side surrounds the central
sanctuary, the outer gallery of which discloses a gateway and finely
worked windows under the triple porch roofs. The inside walls are
illuminated by frescoes surmounted by many niches in the form of
lotus leaves where thousands of statuettes are grouped in pairs. A
wooden ceiling is embellished with gilded panels, and on the altar
stands a giant Buddha entirely covered with gold leaf.

Ever since the death, singers and improvisers of both sexes accompanied by volunteer musicians had recounted the merits, qualities and exploits of the deceased at great length and with emphasis before a numerous audience which remained attentive and never grew tired. They boasted of his good deeds, listed his particular habits and tastes and enumerated his many children and grandchildren.

764
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They dwelled with great satisfaction on the intimacies which he had taken with the fair sex up to quite an advanced age, and in support of their remarks showed brightly illuminated drawings painted on long streamers of glazed calico. These drawings, as much by the truth of the attitudes shown as by their outrageous realism, were the joy of the spectators. Both children and adults roared with laughter as they listened to the highly spicy commentary of the improvisers.

A curious fact was that this exhibition did not occasion any obscene or even suggestive gesture on the part of the audience.

The bonzes, who are the only art students in this country, are the ones who color these pictures. If published in our own land, the latter would certainly call down all the rigor of the law on their author.

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[792]

The day of cremation finally came, and the funeral proper began.

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One of the sons of the deceased first set free two pairs of partridges and turtledoves, pet birds which he had had. The poor creatures were unaccustomed to flight and refused to leave their cage, but then beat their wings and clumsily escaped to a perch a few meters above ground on one of the trees [207] in the garden. A trail of ashes was spread all around the fence surrounding the house of the deceased in order, as popular belief has it, to prevent his spirit from escaping into the nearby region and tormenting the living.

[775]

A solid bamboo stretcher which twelve hardy men would carry on their shoulders was placed on the ground to await the catafalque. Attendance was heavy, and people of all ages came from a distance. They wore their holiday clothes with vivid, light and iridescent colors. They wore flowers in their ears and hair and carried multi-colored streamers, wax candles and sticks of incense in their hands.

[292]

The members of the family, the officials of the Muong and the bonzes were also there in force.

The catafalque was carried from the house by hand and put down on the stretcher, which the porters then raised to their shoulders. At its base, near the feet of the deceased, was fastened a strip of calico

323 The potters' methods and equipment do not differ from those which are in widespread use everywhere.

The method of firing depends on the nature of the article, and firing may be done either in kilns dug out of the clay soil, in the banks of watercourses, or under stacks of rice straw. Wood or rice straw is used to fire the kilns.

In some regions articles are given a shiny black patina resembling graphite by firing them for a second time in paddy husks.

778 Brass-founding. One has only to explore the pagodas of
411 Laos in order to realize that brass-founding used to be held in honor.
415 Religious statues can be found which are sometimes of great [458]
weight and usually of quite fine workmanship and taste, taking into
account, to be sure, the quite special manner in which they conceive
aesthetics.

Although the crucibles have not been fired for many long years for casting such large pieces, the industry of brass-founding continues to be exercised by a certain number of specialists who are content with producing religious statuettes, necessities for betel, bells for elephants and livestock, various kinds of vases, cuspidors, etc.

This industry is an extremely ancient one in the land. It was certainly practiced during the Bronze Age, as is attested by the spearheads, daggers, hatchets and halberds which have been found in northern Laos and which can now be seen in the Saint-Germain museum.

[821] It is interesting to note that the inhabitants of Laos attribute a
[172] meteoric origin to objects of the Bronze Age, as also to those of the Age of Polished Stone. They believe that these objects fall from the sky when it thunders, and that they are produced by lightning.

The following are some of the methods used by Laotian founders. Casting is always done by the lost wax process.

325 Casting statues. On an initial rough clay model, the
532 artist applies a layer of fine, soft and well-pugged clay which he shapes in a more careful manner. Then after covering the statue, which is already much more than a rough draft, with a layer of beeswax of the proper thickness, he finishes modeling the statue on the wax, inserting all the details and all the ornaments which it is to include. Polishing a bit here, engraving there, setting precious stones or simply glass between the eyelids to represent eyes, and inserting gold lips where the mouth is to be located, he gives the

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[323]

model the appearance which it will have when cast.

On this wax surface a very thin layer is first overlaid of clay which is finely pugged, well diluted with water and quite similar in appearance and consistency to the kaolin from which utensils of thin porcelain are molded. When this [459] [Illustration] [460] [Blank page] [461] first layer is dry, a second is applied which is made up of coarser clay, then a third which is still thicker. Finally, when the whole is no more than a mass which has the vague shape of the original model, a good thickness of fire clay which has been kneaded together with chopped straw, buffalo dung and paddy husks is applied by hand. The mold is then ready for pouring as soon as the outer layer dries.

At certain carefully chosen points in the less conspicuous parts of the model, wax plugs have been inserted at the correct angle through the different layers of clay so that they come out to the surface. Some of these will be vent holes to give passage to the vapors which will be emitted when the statue is cast, and the others are the spouts through which the molten metal will be poured from the crucibles.

The mold has been prepared in an excavation in the ground which is as deep as the statue is tall. When everything is ready, the excavation is filled with dry sand which is well tamped down. Finally the crucibles are arranged all around the mold, in greater or less numbers depending on the size of the object to be cast. Each of these has a bellows and sometimes two so as to be prepared for accidents, to hasten melting and to obtain perfect equality of fluidity and heat in the metal in all the crucibles.

When the time comes the metal is poured into all the spouts at once, and if the mold does not burst because of excess humidity, the bronze soon replaces the wax inside the walls of the mold. It is allowed to cool, then the mold is removed. If the operation is successful the statue then appears, smooth and pure and perfectly identical with the wax model. Only the junction points of the spouts and vent holes need any retouching, but the main parts usually come out admirably well.

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Casting various utensils. Small utensils are cast in just the same way, except that the crucible containing the molten metal is connected to the mold and packed in a common covering--a mixture of buffalo dung, chopped straw and paddy husks. Between the mold and the crucible two small lateral openings have been carefully made, the purpose of which is both to allow vapors to escape and to permit judging the degree of fusion of the metal.

degree.

289 Paper. The manufacture of paper using the bark of a tree called "Kok-Sa" (1) is limited to a single region of northern Laos.

(1) See Chapter VII.

It is not of any great importance, since it does not even suffice for local consumption.

The manufacturing processes are those familiar to everyone as being used in China, in Japan, in Annamite lands and in Burma.

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531 Wood and ivory carving. Here we no longer have to deal with an industry, but with an art. The men who practice it are few in number, are highly paid, work slowly and are generally inveterate opium smokers.

Like the goldsmiths and jewelers, the wood and ivory carvers of Laos reproduce, ad infinitum, immutable models which their predecessors have handed down. They are, however, able to execute motifs from any given design. To be sure, they are inferior to their Burmese, Annamite, Malay, Chinese and especially Japanese colleagues as regards the movement, harmony, purity of form and finish of their work.

532 Fresco painting. The pagodas of Laos, which have been left untended for many long years, contain curious fresco paintings set off with gold, but lack of care and exposure to the weather have partly destroyed them. This art has very few practitioners in Laos, and it should be added that most of the existing frescoes are mainly the work of Burmese, Cambodians and Chinese of whom the native artists are only the pupils.

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[438] Pirogue carpenters. Nearly all the inhabitants who [464] live on the banks of the big river or its principal tributaries are able to carve out a pirogue. Certain villages, however, have a monopoly in this industry.

When it is a matter merely of hewing out a pirogue which is to be used only for crossing the river, fishing or agricultural service, everyone does a fairly good job. But for the large pirogues which are reserved for regattas, voyages and commercial transports, recourse must be had to specialists. Only they know how to give their products



Fig. XVII. Vientiane. Frescoes of the Vat Siaket. Story of
Bokhalapat (Cl. Presse-Information).